



NORTH SHORE - LONG ISLAND JEWISH HEALTH SYSTEM  
SETTING NEW STANDARDS IN HEALTHCARE



## SCHNEIDER CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Division of Child &  
Adolescent Psychiatry

Office of Residency Education  
Richard R. Fleck, MD  
Director of Education

7 June 2005

Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Government Reform  
House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6143  
Fax 202 226-3348

Dear Representative Waxman:

Thank you for your concern and request for feedback on the 4parents.gov website. This website got off to a rocky start, with information that was misleading and misguided, but there are signs of some improvements already in several of the topic areas. Recent revisions in the website's language are more inclusive and covers a wider range of American adolescents, but there are still major problems in the language and range of information on the site.

I have shared the initial website's content with members of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry's Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Issues Committee, which I chair. The reaction on the section on sexual orientation and gender identity was uniformly negative, with complaints about the location of the information being hard to find and under the topic of abstinence; the focus being on the parents and their values rather than on adolescents and their healthy development; and the language giving indications to parents that sexual orientation is a "lifestyle" that may be changed by therapy. It is clear that the website authors were not offering information consistent with current scientific evidence and clinical expertise, and thus the effectiveness of such information is severely diminished. In other words, the information is not evidence-based. The Committee members, all distinguished Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists with much expertise in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity, felt that the focus should be on helping sexual and gender minority teenagers develop in a healthy way with stable family relationships. Ways that this can be done include seeking out therapists with professional training with adolescents and in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues; educating parents about the negative effects of bias and stigma on GLBT youth; giving the teens and the parents valuable resources on the web, such as safe spaces and support services; and giving a more overall positive message of hope.



NEW HYDE PARK, NY 11040  
(718) 470-3530

The recent [as of 8/7/05] revision of this section is encouraging, as it addresses some of the concerns we raise, and those already raised by many other professionals. Unfortunately, the section on sexual orientation is still confusingly found under Abstinence from the Topics section on the banner at the top and not from the more obvious topics choices on the sidebar. Having it under Abstinence rather than included in the Sexual Development section is curious and gives the impression that sexual orientation is a negative topic. Besides moving this material to a more appropriate section, I would recommend the following changes to the current version of the website, with my suggestions underlined and in bold:

#### Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an issue that has become more visible in public debate, the media, and often in school curriculum. As such, your child is certain to hear about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender **lifestyles people** at some point.

- Think through your personal views on this issue before discussing it with your adolescent.
- Address this issue in an age-appropriate manner, possibly when you are discussing other sexuality issues.
- State your beliefs and values clearly and calmly.
- One of the most disarming ways to discuss issues with adolescents is to ask them what they've heard.
- Your discussions should take into account your adolescent's awareness of sexual orientation, **and of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in your community and in the media.**
- If you believe your adolescent may be gay, or is experiencing difficulties with gender identity or sexual orientation, consider the following points:
  - All children need to feel accepted and loved.
  - Some teens who question their gender or relationships are at increased risk for depression, suicide or other problems, **most often due to rejection, ostracism, harassment, and even violence by biased peers and adults.**
  - Some parents need help in understanding, communicating and supporting their child. **National organizations such as PFLAG can provide much needed support and information through local chapters and websites.**
  - Counselors and other health professionals **who have training in working with adolescents and in GLBT issues** may be helpful to both teens and parents when addressing difficult issues.
  - **Guide your teen in finding support services and safe environments and activities at school, in the community, and on the internet.**
  - **Appropriate resources for teens and parents can be found through websites such as the Hetrick-Martin Institute; Gay Straight Alliances found in some schools; the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States; and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.**

Other topics on this site also have raised questions and concern, largely due to an overemphasis on abstinence and inadequate and misleading information for parents of sexually active teenagers. These areas of the website also need considerable revision to achieve the goal of providing parents with good and useful information about sexuality issues.

Please contact me with any further questions or concerns you may have. I hope this information will be useful for you.

Sincerely,



Richard R. Pleak, MD  
Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences,  
Director of Education in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,  
Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Long Island Jewish Medical Center  
Chair, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Issues Committee, &  
Secretary, New York Council on Child & Adolescent Psychiatry,  
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry